

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, MASS, ELAB, SPOP, CO
SUBJECT: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HEATED UP DURING ITS FINAL WEEK BUT AS HAS BECOME CUSTOMARY IN COLOMBIA THERE HAVE BEEN NO INCIDENTS OF CAMPAIGN CONNECTED VIOLENCE. PRESIDENT LOPEZ EXPOUNDED HIS VIEWS ON COLOMBIA'S PANAMA CANAL TRANSIT RIGHTS, ITS MARITIME DELIMITATIONS POLICY AND THE POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF PORTUGUESE CORVETTES. LABOR CONTINUED DISSATISFIED OVER THE THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN MEETING THEIR DEMANDS BUT SEEMED INCLINED TO DELAY ANY MAJOR AGITATION UNTIL AFTER THE NEW GOVERNMENT TAKES OFFICE IN AUGUST. A LOCAL PRIVATE GROUP CHARGED, APPARENTLY INCORRECTLY, THAT "U.S. ORGANIZATIONS" WERE BEHIND A CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE ABORTIONS. STUDENTS PERSISTED IN SPORADIC VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST BUS FARE INCREASES.
END SUMMARY.

2. CAMPAIGN HEATS UP DURING LAST WEEK. THE TONE OF THE
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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN BECAME MORE STRIDENT DURING ITS FINAL WEEK (AS REQUIRED BY LAW, PUBLIC CAMPAIGNING WILL END ON MAY 28, ONE WEEK BEFORE THE JUNE 4 ELECTION DAY). WHILE MOST OF THE RHETORIC HAS BEEN DIRECTED AT THE CANDIDATES, LIBERALS HAVE INCREASINGLY DIRECTED THEIR FIRE AT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, CULMINATING IN AN ATTACK BY THE WIDELY RESPECTED ELDER STATESMAN, LIBERAL EX-PRESIDENT ALBERTO LLERAS, WHO

ACCUSED THE CONSERVATIVES OF BEING HISTORICALLY UNTRUSTWORTHY TO WIELD POWER "BECAUSE OF THEIR LETHAL RECORD IN THE GOVERNMENT". CONSERVATIVE POLITICIANS WHO HAVE ENJOYED CLOSE TIES WITH THE LIBERALS OVER THE YEARS, AND WHO HAVE HAD NO PARTICULAR EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE TWO PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES, EXPRESSED THEIR ANGER TO EMBASSY OFFICERS AND SEEM DETERMINED TO INVEST EXTRA EFFORT BEHIND THEIR CANDIDATE. LIBERALS HAVE ALSO BECOME INCREASINGLY INCENSED OVER CONSERVATIVE ORATORY WHICH HAS CALLED BACK INTO QUESTION LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY'S PROBITY, INTELLECT AND EDUCATION, AND HAVE HEATEDLY LASHED BACK, REDOUBLING THEIR CAMPAIGN EFFORTS. UNTIL THE RECENT INCREASE IN TEMPERATURE, HOWEVER, THE TENOR OF THIS CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN SEDATE AND UNEVENTFUL. ALSO, IN KEEPING WITH THE HISTORY OF RECENT POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS, THERE HAVE BEEN NO KNOWN INCIDENTS OF CAMPAIGN-CONNECTED VIOLENCE. EXCEPT FOR POSSIBLE SCATTERED INCIDENTS PROVOKED BY SMALL EXTERMIST GROUPS, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF SIGNIFICANT VIOLENCE OR LABOR UNREST ON ELECTION DAY (BOGOTA 4965).

3. IN A MAJOR ADDRESS ON COLOMBIAN NAVAL AND MARITIME POLICIES, PRESIDENT LOPEZ STATED THAT COLOMBIA HAD NOT SACRIFICED ANY OF ITS TRANSIT RIGHTS THROUGH THE PANAM CANAL. HE DEFENDED HIS GOVERNMENT'S RECORD IN DELIMITING ITS SEA FRONTIERS AND CITED CHARGES BY A U.S. SENATOR THAT COLOMBIA HAD EMERGED AS AN "IMPERIALIST AND VORACIOUS" CARIBBEAN POWER. HE ALSO SPOKE OUT AGAINST COLOMBIA'S INTENTION TO ACQUIRE FOUR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PORTUGUESE CORVETTES AND HOPED THAT THE SALE WOULD STILL GO THROUGH. (BOGOTA 4987).

4. LABOR CONFEDERATIONS REMAINED DISSATISFIED. THE FOUR LABOR CONFEDERATIONS WHICH FORM THE NATIONAL LABOR COUNCIL (CNS) EXPRESSED THEIR INTENTION TO CONTINUE AGITATING FOR GREATER BENEFITS THAN THOSE RECENTLY WON, INCLUDING A LARGER PAY INCREASE, DURING THIS, AND ESPECIALLY THE SUCCEEDING, ADMINISTRATION. THE CNS HARSHLY CRITICIZED THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO SATISFY LABOR'S DEMANDS, BUT CREDITED THE PRESIDENT WITH THEREBY UNINTENTIONALLY PROMOTING LABOR UNITY. DISSIDENT WORKERS IN THE FINANCE MINISTRY ARE ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS CONTINUING DISSATISFACTION AND ARE THREATENING TO STRIKE ON MAY 30 AND 31, IN EXTENSION OF LAST WEEK'S WORK STOPPAGE BY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES (BOGOTA 4779). THE LARGEST DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERATION, THE UTC, INDICATED THAT IT WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO SUPPORT STRIKES WHICH COULD AFFECT THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. COMMENT: THE CNS STATEMENT SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT THE CONFEDERATIONS EXPECT FEW NEW CONCESSIONS FROM THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION AND MAY RESERVE THEIR NEXT MAJOR ACTION FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT WHICH TAKES OFFICE AUGUST 7.

5. LOCAL GROUP CHARGES U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN ABORTION PROGRAMS. THE LOCAL PRESS REPORTED ACCUSTATIONS BY A PRIVATE "RIGHT TO LIFE" ORGANIZATION THAT THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT AND DOCTORS, WITH FINANCING BY U.S. ORGANIZATIONS, WERE PROMOTING THE USE OF KARMAN SYRINGES TO PROVOKE ABORTIONS, AS PART OF A BIRTH CONTROL PROGRAM. THE GROUP CHARGED PROPONENTS OF THE SYRINGE WITH DECEPTION SINCE THEY CLAIM THAT THE DEVICE IS NOT PRIMARILY USED TO REGULATE THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE, ITS ANNOUNCED PURPOSE, BUT TO PROVOKE ABORTIONS. COMMENT. ACCORDING TO AID POPULATION OFFICERS NEITHER AID NOR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES HAVE FINANCED THE SYRINGE, WHICH HAS APPARENTLY BEEN BROUGHT INTO COLOMBIA BY PRIVATE DOCTORS.

6. STUDENTS PURSUE THEIR PROTESTS OVER FARE HIKES. SCATTERED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VIOLENCE CONTINUED IN SOME COLOMBIAN CITIES AS STUDENTS PERSISTED IN THEIR PROTESTS OVER INCREASED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION RATES AND THE STIFF SENTENCES HANDED DOWN BY MILITARY TRIBUNALS TO STUDENTS CONVICTED OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIRE BOMBING OF BUSES LAST WEEK. CLASHES BETWEEN STUDENTS AT BOGOTA'S NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (UN) AND POLICE CAUSED THE UN TO SUSPEND CLASSES FROM 25 TO 29 MAY. REGIONAL BRANCHES OF THE UN, IN MEDELLIN, CALI, MANIZALES AND PALMIRA, MOST OF WHICH HAVE EXPERIENCED SIMILAR DISTURBANCES, WERE ALSO TEMPORARILY CLOSED. AFTER HOLDING THE 11-YEAR OLD SON OF A FRENCH BUSINESSMAN IN BOGOTA FOR 49 DAYS, THE KIDNAPPERS RELEASED THE CHILD UNHARMED ON THE NIGHT OF 24 MAY. THE PARENTS HAVE REFUSED TO DISCUSS WHETHER OR NOT A RANSOM WAS PAID. ASECIO

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